Stephen Reeves 9/1/10

Summary wrt105

Simi Linton, author of “Reassigning Meaning”, argues that because society has adopted the medical meaning of “disabilities” it has begun to have negative social impact on the disabled community. Linton also discusses terms, used to describe people with disabilities and how they are demeaning to them. She begins with the term ableism. Ableism is a term used to “organize ideas about the centering and domination of the nondisabled.”(Linton 223). Ableism, however, was defined in the *Reader’s Digest Oxford Word Finder* as “discrimination in favor of the able-bodied.” (Linton 223). Linton continues to say that ableism can be just as discriminatory as racism and sexism. The expression “disabled people” is the most common amongst disability rights activists. This expression has its benefits for the disabled community. For example, due to its medical definition more advances in science and technology has been developed in order to help the disabled and help prevent diseases. The down side is that due to its medical definition the term “disability” has become a characteristic marker rather than a secondary or tertiary characteristic. This is bad because society now views the disabled as helpless. Linton says “disabled people are rearely depicted on television, in films, or in fiction as being in control of their own lives” (Linton 232), this statement is just an example of how society has adopted the medical meaning of disabilities. She went on to describe “good” words to use when describing a disabled person and also the “nasty” words to use. Linton wrote that words like “physically challenged, able disabled, and handicapable” (Linton 226) were good words to use. Words like “cripple, vegetable, dumb, and deformed” (Linton 227), are considered “nasty” words to use and were degrading to people with disabilities. Linton strongly believed that everywhere should be handicap friendly to some degree. She believed that “if we, as a society, place the onus on individuals with disabilities to work harder to ‘compensate’ for their disabilities or to ‘overcome’ their condition or the barriers in the environment, we have no need for civil rights or affirmative action.”(Linton 229).

Many disabled people are considered “abnormal” by society. Linton explains that there is no actual normal or abnormal society. Society makes up descriptions that fit wanted criteria, such as tall and smart. People with disabilities pass through different barriers every day. The hardest barrier to get past, however, is society. When a society becomes acclimated to words that are used solely for medical purpose, such as the term disability, it becomes more difficult to overcome adversity.